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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

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TAGS: [ECPS](#) [ENRG](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [EU](#)
SUBJECT: LEBANON: NEA DAS DANIN MEETING WITH TELECOMS
MINISTER MARWAN HAMADEH

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Christopher Murray. Reason: Section 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On October 18, visiting NEA DAS Robert Danin, Charge and Econoff met with Lebanese Telecoms Minister and March 14 Group activist Marwan Hamadeh. Hamadeh said that the March 14 group's recently reviewed its goals, noting that Lebanon risks returning to a pre-Hariri assassination political stalemate. As a result, the group reaffirmed the need to push forward and advance reform on the part of the GOL. Hamadeh outlined the need for support from the USG and EU, especially in the area of border security. Satisfied with the support for the GOL from moderate Arab regimes, he noted that he was very worried about Syria and Iran. Nonetheless, Hamadeh expressed optimism about Lebanon's future. End Summary.

MARCH 14 PARLIAMENTARY BLOC REAFFIRM THEIR GOALS

¶2. (C) As a result of an extensive review by the March 14 coalition two days ago, Hamadeh said, the group has outlined a number of objectives for the coming months. The most important is resistance to any attempt to bring down the current government prior to the presidential elections in the fall of 2007. He explained that if anyone -- and he referred several times to both the Iranians and the Syrians as likely candidates -- is able to bring down the current government, then Lebanon will move back to its "pre-Hariri state." Hamadeh said that the March 14 supporters would "go to the street" if they needed to do so, in response to any such action by Hizballah. He indicated that any weakening of the March 14 Cabinet majority, including dilution by additional ministers, combined with the continuing tenures of President Lahoud and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri would leave the Syrians as influential as they had been prior to March 14, ¶2005.

¶3. (C) Further March 14 objectives now included a resolve on the part of the GOL to enhance the security forces. Rather than returning back to an era of militias, the GOL and the Lebanese people want a strong, professional force on the part of the state. In that vein, he said that the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) have greater standing than before the July-August war, and are therefore in a better position to be strengthened as a non-sectarian institution. Again, as a part of measures to shore up security, he explained that the GOL is taking steps to become more aware of threats, and to be pro-active in response, citing a recent incident where the

security services foiled an alleged plot by Hizballah to occupy the government palace.

14. (C) With regard to external affairs, Hamadeh reaffirmed that the GOL is moving aggressively to prepare for the upcoming donor's conference, which he referred to as Paris III, and to address further reform in government. He said the GOL plans to speed up progress towards a vote on the statute establishing the international tribunal on the Hariri assassination and related crimes. He said the documents will be out in a few days, and will be supported, at least at this stage, by everyone including President Lahoud. He also said that they believe that the tribunal measure will deter Syria interference.

SUPPORT IS REQUIRED FROM
BOTH THE U.S. AND THE EU

15. (C) Hamadeh spoke to areas where he felt that support from both the USG and the EU was critical. While he is optimistic about Lebanon's capabilities, he said that little will be achieved without the support of friends who can contain Syria, particularly any growing inclination to engage Damascus by the international community. He raised the need to resolve the issue of Israeli overflights by the Israelis, suggesting possible compensatory steps, including aerial surveillance by the Europeans and/or border monitors (which he said will never seal the Syrian-Lebanese border but can serve a critical role in tracking materiel as it moves into and within Lebanon). Perhaps, he suggested, these elements could be combined into a package deal that would end the overflights.

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16. (C) Hamadeh also suggested that other pressing issues included a need to address Sheba'a Farms and the deployment of UNIFIL forces in southern Lebanon. Hamadeh reiterated that any perceived progress towards addressing the issue of Sheba'a Farms would be useful for the GOL in the process of disarming Hizballah, and would remove a major complaint of the Shia. He said that it is important that UNIFIL troop strength increase quickly, and that the Turks arrive soon since "everyone fears the Turks." He noted that Turkey's centuries-old history with Syria and Iran will give both countries pause to reconsider provocations in southern Lebanon if Turks are present. Finally, Hamadeh said he would like to see a return to the 1949 Armistice Agreement as the defining document between Lebanon and Israel.

OTHER ARAB NATIONS

17. (C) According to Hamadeh, Lebanon is firmly aligned with other moderate Arab regimes in resisting Syria, Iran and Hizballah. In particular, he was pleased with the strong position Saudi Arabia maintains towards Lebanon. He noted that the Saudis invited Abdel Halim Khaddam, the former vice president of Syria and now regime opponent, to visit during Jidda and Riyadh during Ramadan, and that Khaddam took them up on the offer. Hamadeh also pointed out that even Qatar is having a hard time with Syria. In accordance with UNSCR 1701, he said that Lebanon should establish diplomatic relations with Syria, but given that Prime Minister Siniora has put that on the agenda for his proposed meeting in Damascus, the Syrians have so far not been willing to confirm the meeting.

IRANIANS, SYRIANS AND HIZBALLAH

18. (C) Hamadeh expressed considerable concern about combined efforts on the part of Hizballah, Syria and Iran, with Iran the driving force behind the group. He believes Iran is increasing its efforts through media attacks and small

incidents by non-Hizballah groups close to Syria. He said that Hizballah is "digesting" the current situation, given that they both won and lost the war, and also because they fear what he referred to as a potential Sunni/Shia shock, which might result in a loss of popularity for Hizballah. Hamadeh said problems with Syria will never be solved while Asad is in power. He said he also sees increased attempts to draw Iran into Lebanon, citing a proposed MOU, from Hizballah Minister of Energy, to give Iran preference in a study of the Zuq power station, which could result in a four-country (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon) energy stream. He said that this would be stopped in the Council of Ministers.

SOME OPTIMISM

19. (C) Despite the challenges, Hamadeh expressed optimism regarding the Siniora government's ability to withstand the challenges in the future. He said that, although Hizballah may have imported some light weapons since the war, the number of rockets Hizballah claims to hold are exaggerated. He said that he does not expect to see a resumption of hostilities.

MURRAY